VOLUNTEERING OVERSEAS: MOTIVATION, EXPERIENCES AND PERCEIVED CAREER EFFECTS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

At Massey University, Albany

New Zealand

H. Sheena Hudson

2004
SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

This is to certify that the research carried out for the Doctoral Thesis entitled
"Volunteering overseas: motivation, experiences, perceived career effects" was done
by H Sheena Hudson in the Department of Management and International
Business, Massey University, Albany, New Zealand. The thesis material has not
been used in part or in whole for other qualification, and I confirm that the
candidate has pursued the courses of study in accordance with the requirements
of the Massey University regulations.

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Date: 14/6/04
CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

This is to certify that the research carried out for my Doctoral Thesis entitled
"Volunteering overseas: motivation, experiences, perceived career effects"
in the Department of Management and International Business, Massey
University, Albany, New Zealand is my own work and that the thesis material has
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Candidate's Name: H Sheena Hudson

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"Volunteering overseas: motivation, experiences, perceived career effects"

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(b) the text, excluding appendices/annexes, does not exceed 100,000 words;

(c) all the ethical requirements applicable to this study have been complied with as required by Massey University, other organisations and/or committees which had a particular association with this study, and relevant legislation.

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Signature: [Signature]
Date: 16/6/04

Supervisor's Name: Kerr Inkson
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Date: 14/6/04
Dust
It would be dishonest to pretend I went
Because I wanted to turn the
Desert into a garden
Or to realise dreams
That were thousands of years old

I went because it was different
Because I had nothing else to do
Because it was a road
That might not have an end

I knew I would not stay forever
I never thought of tying my future
To this newness
I knew I would take the road back one day

But perhaps carrying with me
A particle
Of the nights silence
Of the day's honesty

Yael Dayan
A poem in the foyer of VSA Head Office, Wellington

Burdened by anxiety and fear,
Beset by temptation and guarded by spiritual powers,
The seeker pursues his/her way along the path of life
Seeking ever a "better way"

Samuel Claggett Chew
ABSTRACT

This study concerns self initiated volunteer expatriation. Drawing on data from interviews and test results from a cohort of 48 New Zealand Volunteer Service Abroad volunteers, it explored their experiences as overseas volunteer development workers.

Most literature concerning expatriates focuses on the expatriate assignment of managers. By comparison volunteer development workers remain an under-researched group. Moreover, much of the expatriate management literature and the volunteer development worker literature adopts a positivist approach using quantitative methodologies and large scale studies and consider expatriates from a managerial perspective, leaving the perspective of the individual relatively unexplored. This study seeks to focus on volunteer development workers, using qualitative as well as quantitative methodology and considering individual rather than organisational attitudes and behaviour. As a theoretical backdrop, the concepts of “protean” career, (Hall, 2002), “hero’s journey”, (Osland, 1995) and “career competencies” (De Fillippi & Arthur, 1996) were used as frameworks to assist understanding.

The study was longitudinal, and focused on a one-year cohort (2001) of volunteers who provided information on three occasions – before, during, and immediately after their assignment. The study used a mixed- methodology design i.e. was both quantitative and qualitative using both in depth interviews and psychometric testing. The study suggests alternative ways of exploring volunteer expatriation with a specific focus on repositioning the individual at the centre of the study.

The study began by focusing and identifying the personalities, (as indicated by the Five Factor Model NEO- PR questionnaire) career values, (as indicated by the Career Orientation Inventory, previous career, attitudes to career and motivation to volunteer (the last two being assessed by a pre-departure structured interview. The experience of VSA assignments was explored by means of a mid-assignment email questionnaire. A second post assignment interview elicited further data on volunteers’ experience of VSA, their evaluation of that experience in retrospect, and their plans for further career development. The NEO and COI were re-administered to check changes over time.

The study indicated that self direction, challenge, adventure and personal resilience were dominant themes in the attitudes to career, motivations and experiences of the VSA assignment. Openness and agreeableness, significantly greater than population norms were dominant and stable personality traits. In addition, the study reported volunteers’ perceived effects of the VSA experience relating to self and career in the forms of increased technical and personal skills, self awareness and challenges to their values. Such outcomes of the study support the use of the “protean “career model (Hall, 1976; Hall, 2002; Briscoe & Hall, 2003) as a way to understand the career transitions made by the volunteers. It also substantiated Osland’s (1990; 1995) notion of the metaphor of the hero’s journey as an adventure and framework to understand volunteer expatriation and VSA phenomena. In addition, the outcomes supported a model of understanding career competencies as career “capital” used as a framework to understand volunteer motivation and the VSA assignment experience as a career episode.
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